

# The History of Tibet

**7<sup>th</sup> Century CE** - Tibet evolved into something resembling a country with a single ruler, Buddhism as the primary religion, and a written language.

**12-14<sup>th</sup> Century CE** - Mongol invaders swept across Eurasia, conquering both China and Tibet and establishing the **Yuan Dynasty (1280-1365 CE)**. Mongols offered military protection in return for spiritual guidance from the Tibetans. Mongols also created the rule of the Dalai Lama (Mongol for "monk with ocean-like wisdom"). Consequently, Tibet became a part of a larger empire ruled by Mongols.



Kublai Khan of Mongols established the Yuan dynasty in China  
<http://www.artsmia.org/art-of-asia/history/yuan-dynasty-map.cfm>

**Ming Dynasty (1368-1644 CE)** - When the native Chinese Ming Dynasty evicted the Mongols, Tibet regained its independence.



**Ch'ing (or Qing) Dynasty (1644-1912)** - Tibet was included once again into a greater China, with the Chinese emperor ruling Tibet loosely through a commissioner who involved himself in Tibetan affairs only rarely. On occasion the Ch'ing emperor sent armies to Tibet to defend it against foreign threats by Britain and Russia, two powerful countries who often had conflicts over efforts to expand their empires.



**1912-1949** - With the collapse of the Ch'ing dynasty in 1912, several parts of the Chinese empire, including Tibet, became independent until 1949. However, even though Tibet had its own currency, army, foreign relations, and a government, China and many other countries never officially recognized it as independent.

**1949-1950s** - During the Chinese Communist Revolution, a strong central government was reestablished in China along with a determination to regain the outer boundaries of Ch'ing rule. Tibet, for the first time, became fully integrated into a Chinese state in 1951. Communist leader Mao Zedong put in place policies to integrate outlying territories into China, including campaigns to change the traditional way of life in Tibet. Many Tibetans revolted against Chinese rule, and in **1959 the Dalai Lama and 50,000-60,000 Tibetans fled into exile in Nepal, Bhutan, and India (where the Dalai Lama set up a government in exile in Dharamsala, India).**

**1960s** - During the Chinese Cultural Revolution, Chinese authorities destroyed many religious buildings in Tibet and other ethnic regions within China.

**1978** – The Panchen Lama, the 2nd-most important figure in Tibetan Buddhism next to the Dalai Lama, was released from 14 years of house arrest and prison. A new round of contacts between the Dalai Lama and the Chinese government began. These talks resulted in negotiations between representatives of the Dalai Lama and Beijing and an agreement to send several Tibetan-exile investigative delegations to Tibet.

**1980s** – In a campaign to improve the plight of the Tibetan people, the Dalai Lama sought international pressure to push the Chinese back to negotiations, in part by traveling to generate popular support for issues such as independence, religious freedom, human rights and the environment. The Dalai Lama encouraged peaceful civil disobedience inside Tibet.

**1989** - The Nobel Peace Prize was awarded to the Dalai Lama, support groups were established in dozens of countries, and parliaments began passing resolutions that attacked Chinese human rights abuses and expressed support for the Dalai Lama - and sometimes an independent Tibet.

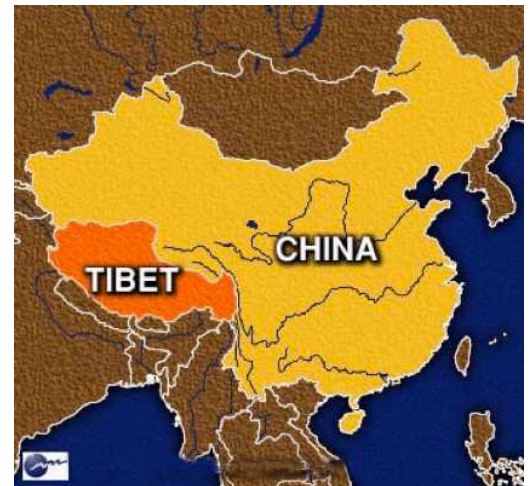
**1993** The Panchen Lama died. In 1995 the Dalai Lama announced that a boy had been selected as the reincarnated Panchen Lama. The Chinese government denounced the Dalai Lama's choice, arrested the boy and his family, and selected its own candidate. The Dalai Lama's candidate has not been seen since his arrest. Within Tibet, repression by Chinese authorities continued. Beijing outlawed pictures of the Dalai Lama, welcomed ethnic migration (including the majority Han Chinese) into Tibet, increased security personnel at Tibetan monasteries, and forced monks and Tibetan officials to undergo "patriotic" retraining. These policies have led to continued and growing hostility toward Chinese rule, as well as public expression of Tibetan nationalism that have included several bombings in Lhasa.

**Currently...** The Dalai Lama has renounced “separatist ambitions” and called for autonomy to “best guarantee that Tibet’s culture will be preserved.” This is an unpopular stance among many Tibetan exiles and their followers, who object to any compromise with Beijing. After four decades in exile, the Tibetan community is beginning to show regional, religious and political cracks.

The Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) itself has undergone dramatic changes in the last 40 years since the Dalai Lama left. It has roads, schools, hospitals and a Tibetan middle class; the overall material well-being of the people has increased, especially in urban areas. Religion is widely practiced, although with restrictions. Tibet is no longer closed, with some 50,000 tourists visiting annually.

Tibetan officials wield less power than their Chinese counterparts. Moreover, the average income and literacy rates in Tibet are among the lowest in China, and tension between Tibetans and Han Chinese is increasing (ethnic Chinese in search of economic opportunities are pouring into TAR to the point that they may soon outnumber the Tibetan population). Between 600 and 700 Tibetans are held as political prisoners, including many monks who peacefully demonstrated against Chinese rule.

Both sides seek the following goals: **for Beijing**, territorial integrity, peace, stability, and economic development; **for the Dalai Lama**, the preservation of Tibetan culture and the freeing of political prisoners. The peaceful resolution of the Tibet issue is in the interests, and to the benefit, of both China and Tibet. The question is whether both sides have the courage to make the hard decisions that will allow them to move ahead.



Adapted from: <http://www.globaled.org/chinaproject/teachingmaterials/seminar/6a1.php>. A. Tom Grunfeld is a professor of history at SUNY-Empire State College. He is the author of *The Making of Modern Tibet* (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 1996).